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ABSTRACT

The response of one urban school community to the tension between excellence and equity in public education was to change the structure, curriculum, and educational practices of its ninth-grade English and history courses fundamentally. This report brings together qualitative and quantitative data to document the efforts of a large urban high school to improve the schooling experience of its students through alternatives to tracking. The large, racially mixed West Coast school experimented with eliminating tracking by grouping its ninth graders heterogeneously in English and history, balancing each core class of 20 students by race and ability. Qualitative data come from interviews with educators, administrators, and parents, and quantitative data come from a survey completed by 744 students in the classes in the 1994-95 and 1995-96 academic years. Data suggest that the level of implementation of the core class approach, from a student perspective, affects achievement, engagement, and enjoyment. Students feel positive about the core system, and report that the multicultural focus of the program does not dilute the curriculum, but actually augments it. The core also provides a small student/teacher ratio, which helps develop a sense of community. Appendixes present the core evaluation survey and the composites used to measure the degree of implementation. (Contains 2 tables and 18 references.) (SLD)

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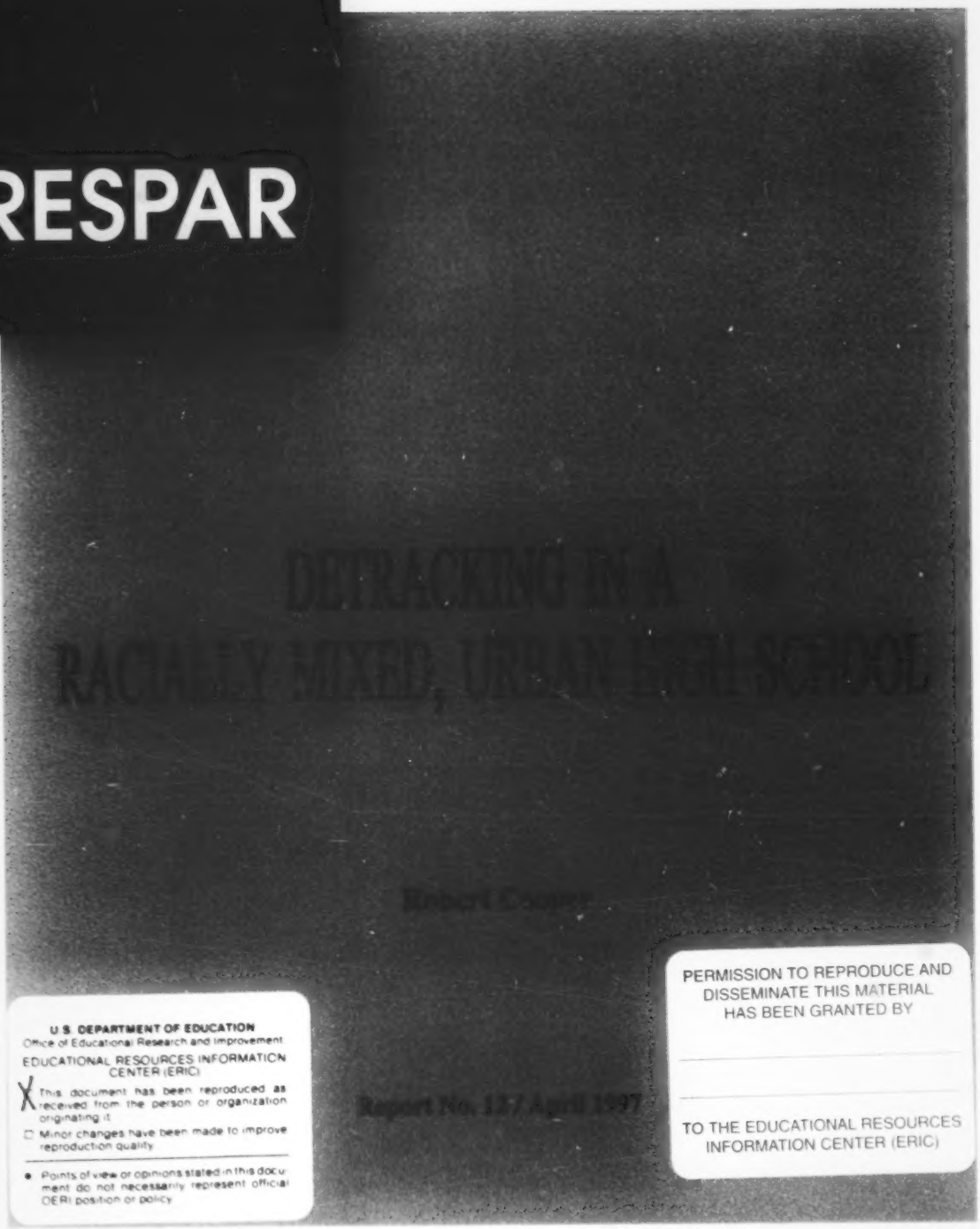

DETRACKING IN A RACIALLY MIXED, URBAN HIGH SCHOOL

Robert Cooper

Report No. 127/April 1997

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DETRACKING IN A RACIALLY MIXED URBAN HIGH SCHOOL

Robert Cooper
Johns Hopkins University

Report No. 12

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The Center

Every child has the capacity to succeed in school and in life. Yet far too many children, especially those from poor and minority families, are placed at risk by school practices that are based on a sorting paradigm in which some students receive high-expectations instruction while the rest are relegated to lower quality education and lower quality futures. The sorting perspective must be replaced by a "talent development" model that asserts that all children are capable of succeeding in a rich and demanding curriculum with appropriate assistance and support.

The mission of the Center for Research on the Education of Students Placed at Risk (CRESPAR) is to conduct the research, development, evaluation, and dissemination needed to transform schooling for students placed at risk. The work of the Center is guided by three central themes — ensuring the success of all students at key development points, building on students' personal and cultural assets, and scaling up effective programs — and conducted through seven research and development programs and a program of institutional activities.

CRESPAR is organized as a partnership of Johns Hopkins University and Howard University, in collaboration with researchers at the University of California at Santa Barbara, University of California at Los Angeles, University of Chicago, Manpower Research Demonstration Corporation, WestEd Regional Laboratory, University of Memphis, and University of Houston-Clear Lake.

CRESPAR is supported by the National Institute on the Education of At-Risk Students (At-Risk Institute), one of five institutes created by the Educational Research, Development, Dissemination and Improvement Act of 1994 and located within the Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI) at the U.S. Department of Education. The At-Risk Institute supports a range of research and development activities designed to improve the education of students at risk of educational failure because of limited English proficiency, poverty, race, geographic location, or economic disadvantage.

Abstract

There is a growing tension between excellence and equity in public education. One urban school community's response to this tension was to fundamentally change the structure, curriculum, and instructional practices of its ninth grade English and history courses. Acknowledging that the school's tracking system served to institutionalize the mutually exclusive relationship of excellence and equity within their community, educators sought alternatives to tracking. Many educators in this community believed that tracking reinforced and widened the academic achievement gap between African American and Latino/Chicano students and their white counterparts, and perpetuated racial and socioeconomic stereotypes. In the absence of any proven alternatives, Liberty High School, a large, racially mixed school in a west coast city, experimented with eliminating tracking by heterogeneously grouping ninth grade students in English and history core classes. Each core class of twenty students was carefully balanced by race and by ability. The move toward heterogeneity assured that all ninth graders were exposed to the same rigorous academic curriculum. By design, the core provided students the opportunity to work collaboratively in groups on common projects in both classes and fostered racial understanding through its multicultural emphasis.

This report brings together both qualitative and quantitative data to document the efforts of a large urban high school to improve the schooling experience of its students. The qualitative portion of this analysis comes from interviews with educators, administrators, and parents. The quantitative portion presents the results of a survey of 744 students in the ninth grade English/history core detracking experiment during the 1994-1995 and 1995-1996 academic years. The data suggest that the level of implementation of the core, from a student perspective, affects achievement, engagement, and enjoyment in the core.

Acknowledgments

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Introduction

Public education in America remains separate and unequal (Steele, 1992; Darling-Hammond, 1993). Despite extensive desegregation efforts following the *Brown* decision in 1954, schools remain stratified by race and social class (Wells & Crain, 1994; Orfield, 1993; Darling-Hammond, 1993; Schofield, 1991). Although early desegregation efforts showed great promise, true integration and equal access to a quality education has yet to be realized. Recent studies suggest that there is an increasing amount of social and economic segregation of students not only between schools, but also within schools (Oakes, 1985, 1990). Educational institutions have policies and practices which facilitate individuals being sorted by race, social class, language, and ability. Perhaps the most pervasive of these educational practices is the process of tracking and ability grouping. Tracking and ability grouping in many school communities serve as the major vehicle to institutionalize and perpetuate racial division on campus. Despite the good intentions of this practice during its inception at the turn of the century, research has documented that tracking and ability grouping can lead to identifiable groups of students, disproportionately students of color and low income students, receiving an unequal distribution of educational access and opportunity.

Many times when schools track, students from different racial groups are not offered equal opportunities to learn. Students of color, who are often disproportionately placed in low track classes, systematically receive fewer resources: teachers are less qualified, expectations are lower, the curriculum is watered down, and there are fewer classroom materials. White students and middle class students, who are disproportionately placed in high track classrooms, are advantaged by receiving more qualified teachers, greater classroom resources, and an enriched curriculum designed to prepare them to attend college (Oakes, Gamoran, & Page, 1992). In these school environments, subtle and not so subtle track-related differences determine which students will receive a quality education and which will merely be trained to assume a permanent role in the nation's underclass (Darling-Hammond, 1985; Cooper, 1995).

Research suggests that tracking not only leads to inequitable learning opportunities, but it also limits opportunities for cross-cultural social interaction. Tracking creates unequal status realities between groups of students and has a strong negative impact on relationships across ethnic lines (Braddock et. al, 1995). For many children, their first encounter with peers of different racial and ethnic backgrounds is in school (Schofield, 1995). Students tend to choose friends from within their own academic track, suggesting that the classroom is the place that facilitates interactions for the formation of social networks (Hallinan & Williams, 1989). Thus, school can have a major influence on children's actual and perceived levels of prejudice (Brilliant, Dibara, & Fiset, 1995). Even in some of the most racially diverse schools across the

country, the vast majority of students "hang out" with students of the same racial or ethnic group. The lack of contact between students of diverse backgrounds enables the perception of harsh stereotypes and racial tensions (Crain, Mahard, & Narot, 1982; Oakes & Wells, 1995).

This report explores one urban school community's attempt to fundamentally change the policies, structures, and ethos that have historically led to the unequal learning opportunities within its school. Liberty High School,[1] a large racially mixed school, chose to "experiment" with reducing the deeply entrenched tracking system within its English and history departments. The process of dismantling the tracking system, a process called detracking or heterogeneous grouping, was limited to its ninth grade program. Upon realizing that the tracked English classes were not serving a large percentage of the freshman students and believing that students would have an easier time learning English and history if the two subjects were taught in some relationship, ninth grade English/history cores were established. Core classes partnered English and history teachers together. Each core class consisted of twenty students and was carefully balanced, both by race and ability. This grouping strategy assured that all ninth grade students were exposed to the same rigorous academic curriculum in English and history, and provided them with the opportunity to work collaboratively on group projects that were common to both classes. In addition, the move also fostered racial understanding through its multicultural emphasis.

This report presents data from a longitudinal study of Liberty High School's detracking experiment. (For a more detailed analysis of Liberty High School, see Oakes & Wells, 1996.) The purpose of this analysis is to investigate the degree to which students perceive that the "principles" of the core are being or were implemented. Do students recognize the school's attempt to provide every student with exposure to a rigorous academic curriculum and high quality instruction in a classroom environment that values racial and socioeconomic diversity? Additionally, this analysis examines student academic achievement, academic engagement, and enjoyment of the core as outcome measures affected by the students' perceptions of the implementation of the core.

The goal of this inquiry is to better understand how school change in general, and detracking reform specifically, contribute to creating more positive and equitable learning opportunities for all students. Despite its importance, little is known about the impact of detracking reform on learning opportunities, academic achievement, and academic engagement of students. As alternatives to the "traditional" tracking system are sought, experiments with detracking and heterogeneous grouping warrant further investigation.

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[1] To preserve confidentiality, the names of schools, places, and educators in this report are pseudonyms.

Description of the Study and the School

This analysis focuses on one large urban west coast high school. Liberty High School, the only high school serving the 102,000 people of Jefferson Town, California, is one of ten racially mixed schools which participated in the study of detracking reform. The study, *Beyond Sorting and Stratification: Creating Alternatives to Tracking in Racially Mixed Secondary Schools*, was funded by the Lilly Endowment, and led by Jeannie Oakes and Amy Wells at the UCLA School of Education and Information Studies. *Beyond Sorting and Stratification* was a three-year longitudinal qualitative case study of ten secondary schools across the county engaging in detracking efforts. It is one of the few major comprehensive research studies on detracking reform in this country.[2]

Liberty was selected for this analysis for two reasons. First, the demographic profile of the student body at Liberty High School covers the gamut in terms of racial and socioeconomic diversity. Within this type of urban multicultural setting, the intersection between race, class, culture, and education illuminates some of the challenges to urban school reform. The illumination of these issues is important because they have significant impact on which reforms are championed, how reform is pursued, and who will benefit from the reform process. Given current projected demographic changes in America's public schools, many more educators, policy makers, and practitioners may find themselves required to lead, manage, and develop policy in similar social contexts. The findings from this study will prove helpful in better understanding school reform within a multiracial context.

Second, Liberty High School's changes in instructional grouping practices represent one of the most comprehensive detracking efforts of the senior high schools in the study. The enormous school support for reform, especially on the part of key administrators and teachers, served as a catalyst to a pilot detracking program that coincided with the start of the *Beyond Sorting* study. Thus, the challenges and progress of this reform effort were documented from its inception.

Liberty High School is a large school with a high degree of student diversity. Serving grades 9 through 12, it has a student population of approximately 2,500 students. The demographics of Liberty High School reflect a student body that is 41% White, 38% African American, 10% Latino/Chicano, 10% Asian and 1% "Other." Despite the diversity that exists

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[2] For a more in-depth description of this study and the methodology that guided the study, see Oakes & Wells, 1995.

within the student body, few students cross the "color boundary" when interacting with their peers outside the formal structure of the classroom. Liberty is very diverse, but it is also very stratified.

School statistics such as graduation rates, college send rates, attendance records, and rates at which students receive D/F grades indicate that Liberty High School provides an extraordinary public education to white, middle, and upper middle class students. Using those same criteria, however, leads one to conclude that hundreds of students of color[3] and low income students fail to engage in the educational process. According to Evan Payne, principal during the first three years of the study,[4] the entire school community is aware of the persistent achievement gap between students of color and their white counterparts. He stated:

> The staff and the community, we all recognize that we are not doing a good job with a large portion of our student body, which is generally African American, Latino, and some Asians. ...We are not meeting their needs...Liberty is just not working for them. I think that a lot of them over the years have been placed in tracks that they felt unsuccessful. And because we have a large group of students who are so successful, the disparity at times is very evident. I think that's what causes some of the kids to feel confused and a sense of failure.

At the inception of the study in the fall of 1992, students of color made up over fifty percent of the student body, but they represented less than ten percent of the students in the "top track " or "advance level" classes.[5] Low track classes consisted of approximately sixty to seventy percent African American or Latino students. To many of the Liberty educators the situation had become frightening. It was simply unacceptable that the average D-F rate in the top track was 22%; in the middle track it was 38%; and in the lower track it was 52%.[6] When identified by ethnicity, 71% of the African American students received a D or an F on their report cards. The rate for Latino students was very similar. Such statistics meant that six to seven out of every ten African American and Latino students went home with a bad report card.

The grave disparity in achievement between students of color and white students contributed to a social and academic climate at Liberty High School that felt like an oasis for some and a place of alienation and discouragement for others. Under the leadership of department chairs, educators in the English and history departments made a commitment to

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[3] The term students of color is used in lieu of minority, and in the context of this research refers to African American and Latino/Chicano students.

[4] Evan Payne has since left Liberty High School. He resigned in the spring of 1995.

[5] These statistics are for the 1992-1993 academic year.

[6] Internal Document

make their departments a place where all students could succeed. Acknowledging that tracking was one of the major contributing factors for the lack of engagement of students of color in their departments, as well as one source of *de facto* segregation within the school, they established a small pilot program to experiment with heterogeneous grouping in the fall of 1992. Four sections of the English/history core were created. Each core class was taught English and history together — taught back-to-back by partnered teachers. Each of the cores was attached to one of the seven Liberty High School "families," composed of an administrator, counselor, and secretary. This commonality provided a greater degree of connectedness for the students and teachers.

In response to the overall generally positive feedback regarding the pilot program, the chairpersons of the English and history departments worked with the principal and his staff to move forward with the concept of coring for the entire freshmen class. Although some modifications were made based on the experience of the previous year, the basic program remained the same. In the fall of 1993, thirty-three sections of the ninth grade English/history core were established. Core classes were taught, as in the pilot program, in a format with the same cluster of students attached to both English and history classes. Although the classes were clustered together, core teachers had an option about the degree of class connectedness. A student who would have traditionally been placed in low tracked English classes because he or she did not pass the state's reading and writing proficiency exam lost one elective period and was given two English classes. The student's second English class was called a back-up class. The back-up class was designed to support learning in the core English classes. Back-up teachers pre-read curriculum materials with the students, which enabled a traditionally low ability student to have more time to work on assignments.

Reform-minded educators at Liberty High School recognize that giving students a voice in the reform process could prove very beneficial. At the end of each year students are asked to evaluate their core experience. This information is then used to make improvements.

Methods

Instrument and Procedure

A 50-item questionnaire was developed to assess student attitudes toward the core detracking experiment. The survey (see Appendix A) consisted of items requiring a rating response on a 7-point Likert-type scale (1 = least favorable; 7 = most favorable). The rating

items dealt with the degree of occurrence of certain educational practices in their core classes. The questionnaire was designed to capture students' attitudes regarding classroom culture, teachers' practices, and their experience in the core.

The data for this analysis comes from approximately 60% of the students who were enrolled in the English/history core during the spring of 1995 and 1996. The questionnaires were distributed and collected in the core English classes.

Measures

Core Implementation Measures. Although a schoolwide philosophy guided the development and implementation of the core, the degree to which implementation took place was left up to individual teachers in each core pair. For example, the degree to which curriculum was altered to be more multicultural, or the degree to which thematic lessons were shared across core pairs, was left up to the discretion of each teacher. Although both the English and history departments agreed to establish student-centered classrooms that utilized small group, cooperative learning techniques, and group projects, there was little accountability to measure how these principles translated into classroom practices. Therefore, the restructuring effort is measured on the basis of which implementation was consistent with its conceptual design.

In accordance with the design plan for the core, students were asked to respond on a scale of 1 to 7, seven being the highest, to the degree in which they agree or disagree with the statements regarding the presence of 20 specific educational practices that they should have experienced in their core classes (see Appendix B). These responses were summed and averaged for each student. This score represents the perceived overall presence or absence of these 20 educational practices for each student.

For the purposes of this analysis, each educational practice was given equal weight. Although it is arguable that certain practices are more important to the implementation of the core than others, no research to date has suggested what that weight distribution should be. Additionally, a factor analysis was conducted to determine if particular survey items, combined together, would measure several overarching themes. However, a decision was made that the presence or absence of each practice, rather than any overarching measures, was more important in this analysis because of the theoretical framework that guides the study.

After each student's overall implementation score was calculated, the students were divided into three groups based on their scores: high implementation, moderate

implementation, and weak implementation. Based on the construction of these groups, several different analyses were conducted.

Student Outcome Measures. Three outcome measures were explored: academic performance in the core, academic engagement in the core, and enjoyment of the core. Academic performance in the core was measured by self-reported grades in both the English and history core classes. The second outcome measure investigated was engagement in the core. The composite variable for student engagement in the core [ENGAGE] combined six questions. The six items were: I like going to history class, I like going to English class, I am bored in history class, I am bored in English class, I do my homework in history class, and I do my homework in English class. The reliability for this variable is modest, with an alpha of .67. The last student outcome measure examined was a student's expressed enjoyment for the core [LIKECORE]. This composite variable combined two questions with an alpha reliability of .88. The two items were: I feel core classes are a good idea, and I enjoy being in the core.

Attitudinal Measures. Seven attitudinal measures were also explored in this analysis. Each measurement is a composite of the student's response regarding his or her attitude in both English and history class. The alpha reliability for these variables varies from .59 to .85: FRIENDLY = .62, CONCERN = .59, INTELLECT = .68, DIVERSE = .85, COMFORT = .66, COOP = .58, NONCOMP = .74. These measures attempt to capture the degree to which students felt that their schooling experience in the core differed and his or her "traditional" classroom experience, which is characterized by homogeneous, competitive, individual learning. Students were asked to rate the degree to which their core classes were friendly, concerned, intellectual, diverse, comfortable, cooperative, and noncompetitive.

Control Measures. To safeguard against potential differences between students across the three levels of implementation being based on student characteristics, such as prior academic achievement and socioeconomic status, several control measures were also explored. Control measures included gender, race, current math placement (which served as a proxy for track placement outside of English and history), and school attended in eighth grade.

Results/Findings

Descriptive Analyses

The data for this analysis represents 744 students, approximately 60% of the students enrolled in the core program during the spring of 1995 and 1996. The sample was racially

representative of the freshman class: 29% African American, 11% Asian, 9% Latino/Chicano, 37% White, and 12% who identified themselves as "Other." Fifty percent of the respondents were female. Forty-four percent of the respondents reported that they had come to Liberty from one of the two feeder schools, and 27% had attended eighth grade outside the Jefferson Town school district. Of the respondents who attended eighth grade outside of Jefferson Town, 13% came from public institutions and 17% from private schools. Additionally, 29% of the respondents indicated that they were enrolled in geometry and 44% in Algebra I. Less than 16% of the sample indicated that they were taking a remedial math class.

The data from these surveys suggest that the core program, from a student perspective, shows promise. As shown in Table 1, 59% of the students indicated that they enjoyed being in the core program; 71% reported that their core classes were comfortable; 59% reported that their classes were cooperative; 69% indicated that their core classes were friendly; and 55% of the students indicated that they were actively engaged in their core classes. The trend in the data indicates that the students' general attitudes toward the core improved over time. The positive response rates for three of the seven attitudinal measures from spring 1995 and spring 1996 were statistically significant at the .01 level. The students in spring 1996 found their core classes more concerned, more intellectual, and more diverse than their counterparts a year earlier.

As in a previous analysis (Cooper, in press), the data also suggest that the core program not only created a positive learning environment for students, but also created intellectually rich and equitable learning opportunities for them. Fifty-one percent of the students reported that the content covered in their core classes challenged their intellectual abilities, while another 25% responded that there was no noticeable difference in their experience. This suggests that many students who traditionally would have been placed in a regular or lower tracked English or history class were intellectually challenged by their core experience, and they enjoyed it. Conversely, perhaps many students who traditionally would have been placed in advanced or honor classes seem to have experienced no noticeable difference in the academic rigor of their core classes.

Providing all students with a challenging curriculum was a major concern of the educators in both the English and history departments at the inception of the program. Department chairs worked very closely with teachers to develop a program that assured that both English and history maintained their rigorous academic standards. One of the guiding principles in the development of the core was not to "dummy down" the curriculum, but to make the type of learning opportunities traditionally available in the advanced and honor track available to all students. The majority of students who responded to the survey indicated that

their core teachers not only intellectually challenged them, but did so with a curriculum that was both culturally sensitive and reflective of issues that were important to them. With its multicultural focus, the core was successful in providing learning opportunities to students of different ethnic and racial backgrounds in a way that challenged students' intellect and provided cultural enrichment. Sixty-two percent of the students indicated that their core classes addressed issues of cultural and racial diversity. Forty-two percent of the students also reported that their teachers provided this intellectually rich environment with the use of small cooperative learning groups.

Table 1

	N	Combined	Spring 1996	Spring 1995
OUTCOME MEASURES				
History Achievement	744	3.10 / (sd=1.03)	3.03 / (sd=1.04)	3.03 / (sd=1.10)
English Achievement	744	3.02 / (sd=1.06)	3.06 / (sd=1.00)	3.05 / (sd=1.07)
Percent Reporting Engagement in the Core	575	55%	58%	53%
Percent Reporting Enjoyment of the Core	565	59%	62%	57%
ATTITUDINAL MEASURES				
Percent Reporting Core Classes Are:				
Friendly	578	69%	70%	68%
Concerned	552	50%	53%*	47%
Intellectual	564	64%	68%*	57%
Diverse	564	64%	68%*	57%
Comfortable	572	71%	72%	70%
Cooperative	549	59%	59%	59%
Noncompetitive	577	55%	57%	52%

* $p < .01$

According to the data, the core program shows promise in promoting greater academic success for more students while maintaining the rigorous academic standards these two departments had historically reserved for their advanced and honor track students.

Analysis of Effects of Perceived Implementation

Like many reform efforts, the establishment of the core program was well thought out and great attention was paid to the "mechanics" of the program. However, the social and

historical context of the institution forced the reform-minded educators at Liberty to make several political compromises that hindered the full implementation of the program by all teachers. Although there was great optimism and excitement for the reform on the part of many educators, there were a few who resisted the change. Even for those teachers who philosophically believed in principles upon which the core was built, there was a lack of training and support to implement this ambitious reform effort. There was no standard or accountability for the implementation of the program. Consequently, the program was implemented to various degrees, depending on the extent to which teachers understood and bought into the principles of the program. Thus, a student's experience in the core varied from core pair to core pair.

This second analysis was conducted to test the mean differences between students based on their perceived level of implementation of the core. Exploring the mean scores of students on outcome measures and attitudinal measures across the levels of perceived implementation is an attempt to better understand the impact of the core experience within the different contexts.

Control Measures

For this analysis, students were divided into three groups: strong implementation of the core, moderate implementation of the core, and weak implementation of the core. Because it was important to ensure that the potential difference between these groups was not related to the demographic characteristics of the students in the three groups, an analysis of variance was conducted on the demographic profile of each group. As expected, the students were evenly distributed across the three different levels of implementation by race, gender, current math placement, and school attended in the eighth grade. The data indicated that there was no statistically significant difference in demographic profiles of the students who constituted the three groups: 26.8% of the students reported that they were in core classes with a weak level of implementation of the core; 48.7% reported a moderate level of implementation; and 24.5% indicated a high level of implementation.

Table 2 presents the results of our analyses for academic achievement, engagement in the core, enjoyment of the core, and students' attitudes toward their core experience. As noted previously, academic achievement is measured on a 4-point scale (A = 4); engagement in the core, enjoyment of the core, and student attitudes reflect student responses on a scale of 1 to 7, with 7 being the highest, to various composite measures.

Table 2

	N	Strong Implementation	Moderate Implementation	Weak Implementation
OUTCOME MEASURES		**Mean (SD)**	**Mean (SD)**	**Mean (SD)**
History Achievement	744	3.176 (.958)	2.936 (1.117)	3.136 (1.044)
English Achievement	744	3.178 (.898)	2.974 (1.022)	3.189 (1.083)
Engagement in the core	575	4.909* (1.168)	4.190 (.988)	3.831 (1.033)
Enjoyment of the core	565	5.442* (1.528)	4.663 (1.512)	3.833 (1.629)
ATTITUDINAL MEASURES				
Core classes are:				
Friendly	529	5.814* (1.102)	5.064 (1.248)	4.116 (1.480)
Concerned	518	5.342* (1.036)	4.600 (1.173)	3.728 (1.220)
Intellectual	521	5.658* (1.036)	4.848 (1.140)	3.808 (1.250)
Diverse	525	5.658* (1.036)	4.848 (1.140)	3.808 (1.250)
Comfortable	523	5.671* (1.266)	5.155 (1.320)	4.353 (1.600)
Cooperative	523	5.442 (1.150)	4.671 (1.285)	3.737 (1.298)
Noncompetitive	522	4.826 (1.682)	4.660 (1.409)	4.460 (1.519)

* $p < .001$

Outcome Core Measures

The first analysis looked at outcome measures. The mean scores of students on the three outcome variables explored varied across the three groups. The means of academic engagement in the core and expressing enjoyment of the core were statistically different between students who reported a weak level of implementation of the core and those who reported a stronger level of implementation. Although the mean scores for academic performance in the core differed across the three levels, the differences between the groups were not statistically significant.

Attitudinal Measures

Students' attitudinal measures towards the core followed a similar pattern to the outcome measures. Generally, the higher the level of perceived implementation of the core, the more positive the attitudes students had regarding the core. Of the seven attitudinal measures explored, the mean difference between six proved to be statistically significant at the .001 level. Students who indicated a greater presence of the educational practices that the core was

designed to include reported that their classes were more friendly, concerned, intellectual, diverse, and comfortable.

Discussion

As Liberty High School educators sought alternatives to their tracking system in their ninth grade English and history programs, they were faced with several difficult questions regarding the connections between their policies and practices and the persistent achievement gap between students of color and their white counterparts. What structures are in place that contribute to an environment that fosters feelings of isolation, discrimination, and separation for students? How can curriculum, instruction, and organization be sensitive to the issues of race, diversity, and pluralism, while maintaining an academically rigorous program? Educators at Liberty were not willing to acknowledge that the perpetuation of the achievement gap was racially motivated, but they did acknowledge that the gap had racial implications. Consequently, the search for alternatives to tracking led the English and history departments to search for alternatives that incorporated issues of access and equity.

The creation of the ninth grade English/history cores was the answer to the English and history departments' quest. Taking on the challenge of dismantling the tracking system in their ninth grade programs was a difficult task. The creation of the core program challenged many of the conventional notions about how classrooms should be structured and organized. Because the concept of the core was predicated on the notion that all students are capable of learning, it also challenged many of the cultural norms that maintained the current organization and structure of the school.

Believing that the best way for students to learn was in a collaborative and cooperative learning environment, reform-minded educators fought hard for the core concept, a radical departure from a traditional individualistic and competitive classroom setting that had historically characterized their school. The idea behind the creation of the core program was not to dilute the curriculum, academic standards, or the quality of education, but to make the access and learning opportunities traditionally available only to high track students accessible to all.

In its fourth year of implementation, the English/history core program is well underway. The core has evolved and developed into a stronger program over the years. Students indicate that the core has been fairly successful in creating positive, intellectually rich learning environments for them. They also report that the multicultural focus of the program does not

dilute the curriculum, as some resisters expected, but actually augments the curriculum in a way that allows them to be both intellectually challenged and culturally enriched. The core provides a small student /teacher ratio which fosters a greater sense of community for students. The small learning communities help students to feel more comfortable in their classes and develop a sense of cooperation versus competition when working with their peers. The data suggest that the stronger the implementation of the core program, the fewer barriers all students have to overcome to be successful.

The creation of the ninth grade English/history core program was an ambitious reform effort. In many ways the reform shook up the status quo and questioned the basic norms that governed the school. Educators at Liberty High School took seriously the task of creating a learning environment in which all students are valued, seen as capable learners, and encouraged to interact cross-culturally. Liberty has taken the first step in institutionalizing its commitment to high academic standards as well as to cultural and racial diversity. Liberty High School continues its struggle to fulfill its promise of being an institution of high academic standards where all students can be successful. To do so, it must become the norm and not the exception to have students of different races, social classes, and abilities learn and socialize together.

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Appendix A

Ninth Grade English/History
Core Evaluation Survey

Liberty High School

Ninth Grade English / History Core Evaluation (May 1995)

Please enter the information requested below, then answer the following questions honestly and thoughtfully. Your responses will remain confidential, and will be used to help improve Core classes in the future.

BIRTHDAY (Month/Day/Year)	LIST the FIRST THREE LETTERS of YOUR LAST NAME	GENDER (Please circle) Male Female
WHAT JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL OR MIDDLE SCHOOL DID YOU ATTEND IN THE 8TH GRADE? *(Please circle)* King Jr. High / Willard Jr. High / Other public school / Private school		
NAME of CORE ENGLISH TEACHER *LAST SEMESTER*:	NAME of CORE HISTORY TEACHER *LAST SEMESTER*:	
WHAT MATH CLASS WERE YOU IN LAST SEMESTER? *(Please circle one)* Geometry / Algebra / CPM/Interactive Math / Math A / Other_____		
WHAT RACIAL / ETHNIC GROUP DO *YOU* MOST CLOSELY *IDENTIFY* WITH? *(Please circle one)* African American / Asian / Caucasian / Chicano / Latino / Other_____		

Using a 7 point scale, where 1 represents *Strongly Disagree*, 4 is *Neutral*, and 7 represents *Strongly Agree*, indicate to what extent do you disagree or agree with each of the following statements about the 9th Grade English/History Core.	Please circle: *Strongly Disagree* 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 *Strongly Agree*
I feel Core classes are a good idea.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
I enjoy being in the Core.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Using a 7 point scale (where 1=*Strongly Disagree*, 4=*Neutral*, 7=*Strongly Agree* as above), indicate the extent to which you disagree or agree with the each of the following statements as applied to your English and History classes.	**For English Class** (Please circle one) *Strongly Disagree* 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 *Strongly Agree*	**For History Class** (Please circle one) *Strongly Disagree* 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 *Strongly Agree*
The time of day negatively effects my attendance.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
I like going to class.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
I do my homework.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
My nightly homework takes more than 30 minutes.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
The content of the class challenges my intellectual abilities.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
I learn a lot about different cultures.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
My teacher mostly lectures during class.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
We work in small groups.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
The teacher expects everyone to participate in class discussions.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
The teacher calls on most students for answers.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
Most students participate in class discussions.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
Students are disruptive in our class.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
My teacher handles disruptive students well.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
My teacher is a fair grader.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
I learned to write an essay better this year in this class.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
I am bored in class.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
The curriculum reflects issues that are important to me.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
The curriculum is culturally sensitive.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	1 2 3 4 5 6 7

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Using a 7 point scale, where 1 represents *Strongly Disagree*, 4 is *Neutral*, and 7 represents *Strongly Agree*, indicate to what extent do you disagree or agree with each of the following.	Please circle: *Strongly Disagree*						*Strongly Agree*
The Core gives students of different races the opportunity to work together.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
My class schedule influences my choice of friends.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I spend time with students of different races at lunch.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Please report the grade you received last semester in each of the following subjects and indicate how accurate each of these grades reflect your ability using the scales below.

SUBJECT	GRADE	How does this grade reflect your ability? *Not accurate*						*Accurate*
English		1	2	3	4	5	6	7
History		1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Math		1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Ethnic Studies		1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Science		1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Foreign language		1	2	3	4	5	6	7

	Compared to other 9th graders in school, how do you describe your ability? *Worse than others*						*Better than others*
English	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Reading comprehension	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Writing skills	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
History	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Math	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Ethnic Studies	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Science	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Foreign language	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Please circle the number that is closer to the word that most accurately describes your core class.

English Core Class									**History Core Class**								
Hostile	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Friendly	Hostile	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Friendly
Indifferent	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Concerned	Indifferent	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Concerned
Non-Intellectual	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Intellectual	Non-Intellectual	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Intellectual
Homogeneous	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Diverse	Homogeneous	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Diverse
Uncomfortable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Comfortable	Uncomfortable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Comfortable
Uncooperative	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Cooperative	Uncooperative	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Cooperative
Competitive	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Noncompetitive	Competitive	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Noncompetitive

What do you plan on doing *immediately* after you graduate from high school? *(Please circle)*

(a) Four year college or university
(b) Two-year or junior-college
(c) Attend a technical college/institute
(d) Find full-time employment
(e) Don't know
(f) Other _____

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Appendix B

Composites Used to Measure Degree of Implementation

Composites used to measure degree of implementation

The content of my English class challenges my intellectual ability

The content of my history class challenges my intellectual ability

I learn a lot about different cultures in my English class

I learn a lot about different cultures in my history class

My English teacher expects everyone to participate in class discussion

My history teacher expects everyone to participate in class discussion

We work in small groups in my English class

We work in small groups in my history class

The teacher expects everyone to participate in class discussion in English class

The teacher expects everyone to participate in class discussion in history class

The teacher calls on most students for answers in English class

The teacher calls on most students for answers in history class

Most students participate in class discussions in English class

Most students participate in class discussions in history class

My English teacher handles disruptions well

My history teacher handles disruptions well

The English curriculum reflects issues that are important to me

The history curriculum reflects issues that are important to me

The English curriculum is culturally sensitive

The history curriculum is culturally sensitive

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